

(323) 881-2401

October 9, 2002

TO: EACH SUPERVISOR

FROM: P. MICHAEL FREEMAN

LETTER TO RESIDENTS - EXTREME FIRE DANGER

Due to the unprecedented wildland fire activity that we have experienced this year, we are sending a letter to all residents that live in the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones within Los Angeles County.

The purpose of the communiqué is to notify the citizens of the extreme fire danger throughout Southern California and the potential for severe fire behavior even in the absence of strong winds produced by Santa Ana conditions. Additionally, residents are being informed to pay attention to conditions in their neighborhoods and immediately comply with instructions to evacuate which is critical to their safety in the event of a fire. The correspondence will be mailed to the public on Friday, October 11, 2002. The document will also be available on the Fire Department's website at www.lacofd.org.

Included with the letter are handouts regarding brush clearance and evacuations. A copy of the correspondence and enclosures are included for your review.

If you have any questions, please contact me or your staff may contact David Leininger, Chief, Forestry Division, at (323) 890-4330.

PMF:DRL:lc

Enclosures

c: David E. Janssen
Louisa Ollague
Randi Tahara
Joseph Charney
Matt Knabe
Jennifer Plaisted

(323) 881-2401

October 11, 2002

Dear Resident:

Greetings to you and your household from all of us here at your Los Angeles County Fire Department. As you know, your property is situated in a very high fire hazard severity zone because it is so close to flammable vegetation. The next several weeks will prove to be the most dangerous time of the year for destructive wildland fires because of low humidity and strong winds.

As you are no doubt aware, we are experiencing critically dry vegetation and brush conditions. Wildland fires are burning with extreme intensity and spreading rapidly, even in the absence of strong winds such as those produced by the Santa Ana conditions. We have already witnessed several of these large, devastating wildfires this year.

Veteran wildland firefighters have been amazed by such extreme fire behavior. In many cases, firefighters have experienced "near misses" and have had to retreat from structure protection for their own safety. Current wildland fuel conditions contributed to a record number of acres burned in a 24-hour period last June in the Angeles National Forest, and the enormous fire now burning in the Angeles National Forest above our foothill communities.

We are in the midst of a serious and dangerous fire season, and you and your property are of great concern to your Los Angeles County Fire Department. Please be aware that failure to evacuate all persons from your property when advised to do so during a fire is likely to result in the loss of life or serious injury to yourself and others with you because of extreme wildfire conditions.

In the event of a brush fire, numerous firefighters, aircraft and specialized equipment will respond as quickly as possible. Their primary purpose is to save lives and property, but recent fire experience indicates that they may be unsuccessful and be forced to retreat themselves.

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Therefore, your attention to conditions in your neighborhood and immediate compliance with instructions to evacuate will be critical for your safety in the event of a fire. To further assist you, we have enclosed some helpful information regarding brush clearance and evacuations. We urge you to review this information carefully and take action to prepare your family and your property now.

For additional information, please contact your local fire station or call the Los Angeles County Fire Department at (323) 881-2411. Also, you may access our website at www.lacofd.org.

Sincerely,

P. MICHAEL FREEMAN

PMF:kj

Enclosure

Brush Clearance Tips

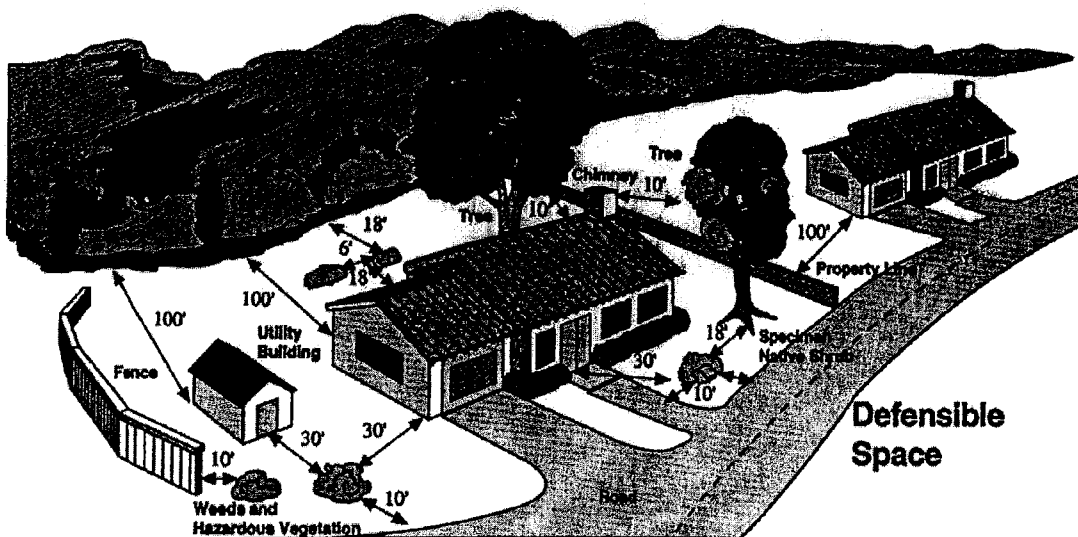
www.lacofd.org

Home Landscaping and Yard

- Remove flammable vegetation and other combustible growth within 30 ft. of any structures. Increase to 50 ft. in high hazard areas. Thin out or remove other vegetation an additional 70 ft. from structures for a total of 100 ft. (200 ft. in high hazard areas).
- Single trees, ornamental shrubbery and ground covers may be permitted provided they do not readily transmit fire from native vegetation to structures.
- Landscape with plants that are drought tolerant and fire resistant. Maintain plants!
- Space trees and shrubs a minimum of 15 ft. apart or three times their diameter from other shrubs.
- Trees should be spaced to allow a minimum of 30 ft. between canopies at maturity.
- Trees taller than 18 ft., prune lower branches within 6 ft. of the ground.
- For trees and shrubs of less than 18 ft. prune lower branches to one-third of their height.
- Maintain all plants by regularly removing dead branches and leaves.
- Remove all stacks of combustible materials.
- Stack wood at least 30 ft. from structures. Remove flammable vegetation within 10 ft. of woodpiles.
- Locate fixed butane/propane tanks at least 10 ft. from any structure and maintain 10 ft. of clearance.

Home Access

- Identify at least two exit routes from your neighborhood.
- Post road signs to show traffic restrictions such as dead-end roads and height and weight limits.
- Clear back flammable vegetation at least 10 ft. from roads and driveways.
- Cut overhanging tree branches above roads to provide minimum of 16 ft. of clearance.
- Make sure street names and numbers are visible at intersections.
- Post address on front of house. If your house is not visible from street, post sign next to the



P. Michael Freeman
Fire Chief



County of Los Angeles *Fire Department* *Operation Evacuation*

EVACUATION PLAN

Do you have one?

Emergency preparedness must be a priority for everyone that lives or works in a wildland interface area. A major part of your preparedness is to develop a logical well thought out and executed evacuation plan. A good evacuation plan includes the following:

- Predetermined routes of travel based on direction fire is moving.
- Identify at least two (2) exit routes from your neighborhood.
- Knowledge of designated residential assembly points within your local area.
- Knowledge of local emergency contacts.
- Plan, review, and practice with family and neighbors.

PREPARATION AHEAD OF THE FIRE

- Back the car in the garage heading out (windows closed and keys in the ignition).
- Close the garage door, leave it unlocked, disconnect the automatic garage door opener in the case of power failure.
- Place important documents, photo albums, pets and other valuables inside your car in case you have to evacuate.
- Keep a flashlight and portable radio with you at all times and stay tuned to your local news station.

DURING EVACUATION

- If you become trapped by fire while evacuating in your car, park in an area clear of vegetation, close all vehicle windows and vents, cover yourself with a blanket or jacket and lie on the floor.
- If you are trapped by fire while evacuating on foot, select an area clear of vegetation or lie faced down in a ditch.

IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO EVACUATE WHEN A FIRE APPROACHES

- Stay inside your house away from outside walls.
- Keep all doors closed but leave them unlocked.
- Keep your entire family together and REMAIN CALM. Remember if it gets hot in the house, it is four to five times hotter and more dangerous outside.

AFTER THE FIRE PASSES

- Check the exterior and roof immediately, extinguish all sparks and embers. If you must climb on the roof, use caution.
- Check inside the attic for hidden burning embers.
- Check your yard for burning woodpiles, trees, fence posts or other materials.